

Israel's Proclamation of Independence

The Anglo-American Commission failed to resolve the problem of competing Zionist and Arab claims to Palestine. In 1947 Britain informed the United Nations, which had replaced the League of Nations, that it could not continue indefinitely to administer Palestine. The United Nations then called for the partition of Palestine into Jewish and Arab states. On May 14, 1948, the Jews of Palestine proclaimed the independent State of Israel. The next day — when British authority officially ended — armies from the Arab nations invaded Israel. But the Arabs were defeated. At the end of the war, Israel controlled 77 percent of the former Palestine rather than the 57 percent the United Nations had allotted to a Jewish state. In the course of the war, 900,000 of the 1,300,000 Arabs who had been living in the Israeli part of Palestine became refugees.

What reasons does this document give for the establishment of Israel? What provision does the new state seem ready to make for Palestinian Arabs? Do these differ from the rights of Jews?

Thinking Historically

Can you see signs of any potential future conflicts in this document? Does this proclamation minimize or resolve any of the conflicts you read about in the previous selection? Does it magnify the conflicts mentioned in selection 71? If so, how?

Notice how the authors of this document use their view of history to support their position. How might the Palestinian-Arab view of history differ?

The Land of Israel was the birthplace of the Jewish people. Here their spiritual, religious, and national identity was formed. Here they achieved independence and created a culture of national and universal significance. Here they wrote and gave the Bible to the world.

Exiled from the Land of Israel the Jewish people remained faithful to it in all the countries of their dispersion, never ceasing to pray and hope for their return and the restoration of their national freedom.

Impelled by this historical association, Jews strove throughout the

centuries to go back to the land of their fathers and regain their statehood. In recent decades they returned in their masses. They reclaimed the wilderness, revived their language, built cities and villages, and established a vigorous and ever-growing community, with its own economic and cultural life. They sought peace, yet were prepared to defend themselves. They brought the blessings of progress to all inhabitants of the country and looked forward to sovereign independence.

In the year 1897 the First Zionist Congress, inspired by Theodor Herzl's vision of the Jewish State, proclaimed the right of the Jewish people to national revival in their own country.

This right was acknowledged by the Balfour Declaration of November 2, 1917, and re-affirmed by the Mandate of the League of Nations, which gave explicit international recognition to the historic connection to the Jewish people with Palestine and their right to reconstitute their National Home.

The recent holocaust, which engulfed millions of Jews in Europe, proved anew the need to solve the problem of the homelessness and lack of independence of the Jewish people by means of the reestablishment of the Jewish State, which would open the gates to all Jews and endow the Jewish people with equality of status among the family of nations.

The survivors of the disastrous slaughter in Europe, and also Jews from other lands, have not desisted from their efforts to reach Eretz-Yisrael, in face of difficulties, obstacles, and perils; and have not ceased to urge their right to a life of dignity, freedom, and honest toil in their ancestral land.

In the second World War the Jewish people in Palestine made their full contribution to the struggle of the freedom-loving nations against the Nazi evil. The sacrifices of their soldiers and their war effort gained them the right to rank with the nations which founded the United Nations.

On November 29, 1947, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted a Resolution requiring the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. The General Assembly called upon the inhabitants of the country to take all the necessary steps on their part to put the plan into effect. This recognition by the United Nations of the right of the Jewish people to establish their independent State is unassailable.

It is the natural right of the Jewish people to lead, as do all other nations, an independent existence in its sovereign State.

Accordingly we, the members of the National Council, representing the Jewish people in Palestine and the World Zionist Movement, are met together in solemn assembly today, the day of termination of the British Mandate for Palestine; and by virtue of the natural and historic right of the Jewish people and of the Resolution of the General Assembly of the United Nations.

We hereby proclaim the establishment of the Jewish State in Palestine, to be called Medinath Yisrael (The State of Israel).

The State of Israel will be open to the immigration of Jews from all countries of their dispersion; will promote the development of the country for the benefit of all its inhabitants; will be based on the principles of liberty, justice, and peace as conceived by the Prophets of Israel; will uphold the full social and political equality of all its citizens, without distinction of religion, race, or sex; will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, education, and culture; will safeguard the Holy Places of all religions; and will loyally uphold the principles of the United Nations Charter.

The State of Israel will be ready to co-operate with the organs and representatives of the United Nations in the implementation of the Resolution of the Assembly of November 29, 1947, and will take steps to bring about the Economic Union over the whole of Palestine.

We appeal to the United Nations to assist the Jewish people in the building of its State and to admit Israel into the family of nations.

In the midst of wanton aggression [by Arab states], we yet call upon the Arab inhabitants of the State of Israel to preserve the ways of peace and play their part in the development of the State, on the basis of full and equal citizenship and due representation in all its bodies and institutions — provisional and permanent.

We extend our hand in peace, and neighbourliness to all the neighbouring states and their peoples, and invite them to cooperate with the independent Jewish nation for the common good of all. The State of Israel is prepared to make its contribution to the progress of the Middle East as a whole.

Our call goes out to the Jewish people all over the world to rally to our side in the task of immigration and development, and to stand by us in the great struggle for the fulfillment of the dream of generations for the redemption of Israel.

HENDRIK F. VERWOERD

On Apartheid

South Africa was settled by Europeans from Holland and England in the middle of the seventeenth century. From the beginning, Europeans had contact with the Khoikhoi indigenous people who were swiftly decimated by European diseases. As Europeans expanded inland from their original seacoast settlements, they farmed the interior with Khoikhoi labor and with slaves imported largely from Indonesia and Madagascar. By the end of the nineteenth century, European settlers engaged in frequent wars with the Xhosa and Zulu people (African Bantu speakers), who were ultimately subdued by machine guns. After the English defeated the Dutch in the Boer War at the turn of the century, the Republic of South Africa was declared in 1910. For most of the period before World War II, despite the English victory, moderate Dutch leaders ruled South Africa, restricting black African land ownership and civil rights. After the discovery of gold and diamonds in South Africa near the end of the nineteenth century, the need for workers from all races was great, and the friction between whites and blacks increased considerably.

During World War II, many white South Africans, some of whom had been educated in Germany, supported the Nazis. In 1948 a reconstituted Nationalist Party, backed by fascist and paramilitary movements, won a surprising electoral victory on the promise of a new, more segregationist policy called apartheid. In this selection, Hendrik F. Verwoerd explains the meaning of and rationale behind apartheid. Verwoerd, educated in Nazi Germany, was a key figure in the creation and execution of South African racial policy as the first "Native Minister" and later as prime minister (1958-1966).

The policy of apartheid was twofold: First, black "Bantu" speaking Africans (not the smaller and more absorbed populations of Khoikhoi and "people of mixed race"), who were needed for work but banned from "European cities," were declared to be no longer South African. Labeled instead "natives" of "independent homelands," this 70 percent of the population was moved to landlocked scrub, a paltry 13-percent share of former South African territory. Second, the needed black workers were allowed to commute weekly from these homelands to work in white South African mines and cities